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SECOND PETER 1:5-7: A STUDY IN TRANSLATION

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And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.—King James or Authorized Version, 1611.

Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in *your* virtue knowledge; and in *your* knowledge temperance; and in *your* temperance patience; and in *your* patience godliness; and in *your* godliness love of the brethren; and in *your* love of the brethren love.¹—English Revised Version, 1881.

The variations in the two versions are striking and suggest study. The older version has the merit of being easy to understand. The wayfaring man who hears it will know what it means. The new version is presumably more faithful to the original, but the wording “in your faith supply virtue” is ambiguous. What it means I do not know, and a little inquiry among intelligent people, not theologians, shows that it conveys no definite meaning to the average reader. The rendering here *transfers* the Greek idiom; it does not *translate* it. The Greek text, with no important variation in the MSS, runs as follows:

καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο δὲ σπουδὴν πᾶσαν παρεισενέγκαντες ἐπιχορηγήσατε ἐν τῇ πίστει ὑμῶν τὴν ἀρετὴν, ἐν δὲ τῇ ἀρετῇ τὴν γνώσιν, ἐν δὲ τῇ γνώσει τὴν ἐγκράτειαν, ἐν δὲ τῇ ἐγκρατείᾳ τὴν ὑπόμονήν, ἐν δὲ τῇ ὑπομονῇ τὴν εὐσέβειαν, ἐν δὲ τῇ εὐσεβείᾳ τὴν φιλαδελφίαν, ἐν δὲ τῇ φιλαδελφίᾳ τὴν ἀγάπην.

Four points demand consideration: (1) the opening words of connection; (2) the participial clause; (3) the verb *ἐπιχορηγεῖν*; (4) the various virtues or graces.

1. The passage opens with a common Greek idiom, *αὐτὸ τοῦτο*,

¹ The margin gives “self-control” for “temperance,” while the American Revision puts “self-control” in the text, and also restores “brotherly kindness,” thus avoiding the awkward conclusion of the English Revision. For “patience” the American Revision gives in the margin “steadfastness.”

which is found in Xenophon and Plato. "For this very reason or purpose," "on this very account," are satisfactory translations, and here the new Revision is clearly superior to the old which misses the logical connection. The thought of the preceding verses is that God has called us by his own glory and virtue to a holy life; that to encourage us he has given great and precious promises, in order that we may escape the corruption which is in the world through evil desires, and may become partakers of the divine nature. "For this very reason, then," the thought goes on, "we are to be diligent to grow in virtue and holiness."

2. The participial clause. The A.V., "giving all diligence," and the R.V., "adding on your part all diligence," are literal translations of the Greek, but are not idiomatic English. One would not write to a friend, "Using all diligence, avoid accidents," but "Be very careful to avoid accidents." The force of the participle is of course with the following verb, and it should be rendered with it. "Use all diligence to add to your faith," or "Take every care to supply," etc.

3 The verb *ἐπιχορηγεῖν* and its context. The real difficulty lies here, as a comparison of some of the varying translations will show:

Vulgate: "Ministrate in fide vestra virtutem."

Wyclif: "Minister in your faith virtue."

Luther: "Reichet dar in eurem Glauben Tugend."

Tyndale: "In your faith minister virtue."

Rheims: "Join with your faith virtue."

Tremellius: "Adiicite fidei vestrae virtutem."

A. V.: "Add to your faith virtue."

Dean Alford: "Provide in [the exercise of] your faith virtue."

R. V.: "In your faith supply virtue."

Twentieth Century N. T.: "Take every care to see that your faith is not severed from a good life."²

The verb *χορηγεῖν* had its origin in the Athenian custom of maintaining a state Chorus which the person chosen as choregus had the expensive honor of equipping or even of supporting. Hence the verb came to mean "to furnish," "to supply," "to equip," "to provide." The compound *ἐπιχορηγεῖν* means strictly "to furnish" or

² This rendering begins admirably but its conclusion lacks the simplicity which this translation aims to give.

“supply besides” or “in addition,” but sometimes it has only the force of the simple verb. The Vulgate *ministrare* and the “minister” of the older versions correspond closely to the Greek as the English dictionaries show, for the first meaning of the verb *minister* is “to furnish,” “to provide,” “to supply.” But the rendering “supply in your faith virtue” is not clear. Does it mean that those to whom the letter is written have faith without virtue, and virtue without knowledge, etc. ? Does it mean that *in place of* faith they are admonished to supply virtue, and so on ? Or does it mean that *in the exercise of* faith they are to show virtue ? This is Dean Alford’s interpretation and has much to commend it. As the Revision stands the translators seem simply to have transferred an ambiguity from the Greek to the English. By so doing they have avoided the possibility of a wrong translation, or a wrong interpretation, but this is a doubtful merit. He who translates must frequently interpret where there is ambiguity and therefore possibility of error. A translation for the people must be one which the people can understand.

4. The several virtues or graces These are rendered with considerable variation as the table illustrates:

Greek	Vulgate	Wyclif	Tyndale	Amer. R.V.
πίστις	fides	faith	faith	faith
ἀρετή	virtus	virtue	virtue	virtue
γνώσις	scientia	cunning	knowledge	knowledge
ἐγκράτεια	abstinentia	abstinence	temperancy	self-control
ὑπομονή	patientia	patience	patience	patience
εὐσέβεια	pietas	piety	godliness	godliness
φιλαδελφία	amor fraternitatis	love of brotherhood	brotherly kindness	brotherly kindness
ἀγάπη	charitas	charity	love	love

Rheims follows the Vulgate. A.V. is like Tyndale except in reading “charity” for “love.” “Self-control” is today a broader word than “temperance,” and “love” than “charity.” “Godliness” has a quaint sound and we may substitute “holiness.” *Φιλαδελφία* is the most difficult to render as no single word exactly corresponds, and the repetition of a phrase mars the sound of the translation. “Brotherly kindness” seems the best rendering of those found in the various versions, but “brotherly affection” is perhaps more faithful to the original. I would suggest that the adjective “Christian” be

prefixed to the word "love" to make the sense more distinct. The list will then run,—Faith, Virtue, Knowledge, Self-control, Patience, Holiness, Brotherly affection, Christian love.

The question now arises whether the virtues are here arranged in an ascending series. Dr. Bigg calls attention to the "Progression" (*προκοπή*) of the Stoics, in which there is gradual approach toward virtue. The Pauline use of the noun and of the verb *προκόπτειν* shows familiarity with the Stoic sense.³ Yet the Pauline lists of virtues (Gal. 5:22, 23, or Phil. 4:8, etc.) group them by kinds rather than in a progressive series. The list before us begins with Faith and culminates in Love, reminding us of the Faith, Hope, and Love of I Cor. 13:13, or of the phrase, "Faith working through Love" (Gal. 5:6), but the intention is not to form the virtues into a ladder leading up to heaven, nor to set them up as milestones along the way of life, but to show that all are needed in a harmonious and perfect character. The Christian virtues are not fractions which together make up the unit of divine virtue, but they are inseparable in the holy life which becomes gradually "partaker of the divine nature"

What has just been said has a plain bearing on the translation of the verb. Rendered literally it means "to provide in addition." The A. V. "add to your faith virtue" comes close to the sense here required. The Rheims translation "join with your faith virtue" is even better. As an alternative for the margin may be added Dean Alford's wording "in the exercise of your faith provide virtue." The following translation is accordingly suggested:

And for this reason use your utmost care to join with your faith virtue,⁴ and with virtue knowledge, and with knowledge self-control, and with self-control patience, and with patience holiness, and with holiness brotherly affection, and with brotherly affection *Christian* love.

³ Note Gal. 1:14; Phil. 1:12, 25; I Tim. 4:15.

⁴ Or, "In the exercise of your faith to provide virtue, and in your virtue knowledge," etc.